



Ashoka Stumbh at Museum

The Museum : The Archeological Survey of India maintains a site museum at Sanchi. Noteworthy antiquities on display include the lion capital of the Ashokan pillar and metal objects used by the monks, discovered during excavations at Sanchi.

Excursions

Sonari : Stupa No. 1 is a solid hemisphere of dry masonry. It is made over a cylindrical plinth of about four feet high with fragments indicating traces of railings. No. 2 and 3 are similar in shape and smaller in size. The site is a good example of Sungan architecture style.

Andher : There are three stupas consisting of circular drums and hemispherical domes similar and contemporary with those of Sanchi. The site is the best example of Sungan architectural style.

Satdhara : The main Stupa of the site is similar to that of Sanchi having remains of railings. It is 13.65 mt. high excluding platform with diameter of 32.80 mt. Recent excavations have revealed brick paradakshinapatha & staircase of the Stupa. Other remains are of monastery and apsidal temples (Maurya & Sunga Period). The site is the best example of Mauryan & Sungan architectural style.

Raisen Fort : The hill fort of Raisen stands on the Vindhya range (23 kms towards south of Sanchi). There is no record about the builder of the Fort but it was occupied by Faiz Mohammad Khan the nawab of Bhopal in 1760 and by the British in 1816. Amongst the various monuments, all in varying degrees of preservation are the Badal Mahal, Raja Rohini Mahal, Hawa Mahal Jehangir Mahal and Kachehri mahal. Besides, Raisen fort has several temples, a mosque and a mazar.

How To Reach

By Air : Nearest airport is at Bhopal (46 km via Diwanganj and 78 km via Raisen).

By Rail : Sanchi lies on the Jhansi-Itarsi section of the Central Railways. However, the most convenient railheads are Vidisha (10 km) and Bhopal (46km).

By Road : Good, motorable roads connect Sanchi with Bhopal, Indore, Sagar, Gwalior, Vidisha and Raisen, besides other places.

Best Season: July to March

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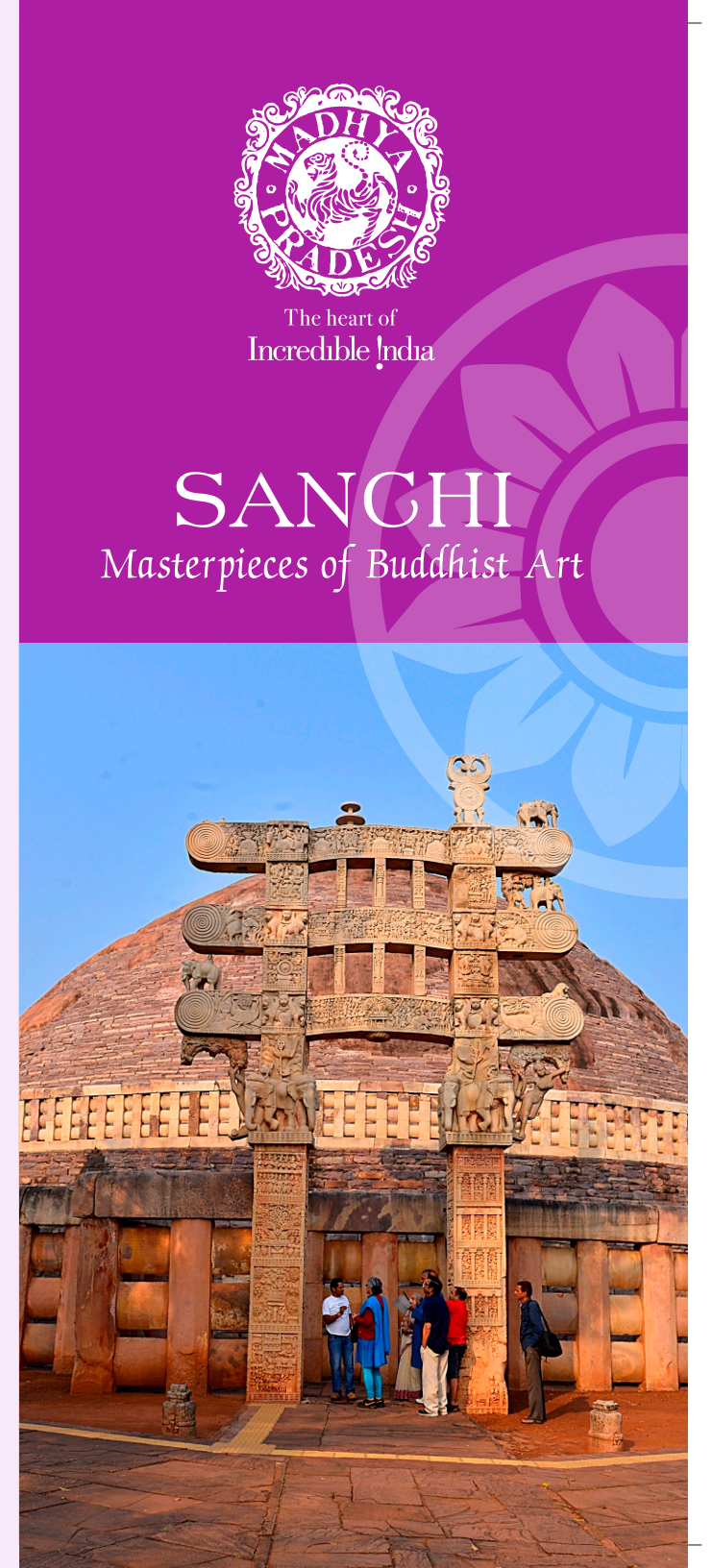
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Great Stupa No. 1 : The oldest stone structure in India

Sanchi's stupas, monasteries, temples and pillars dating from the 3rd century BC to the 12th century AD have been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The most famous of these monuments, Stupa 1, known as the Great Stupa, was originally built by the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, the then governor of Ujjayini, whose wife Devi was the daughter of a merchant from the adjacent town of Vidisha. Their son Mahindra and daughter Sanghamitra were born in Ujjayini and sent to Sri Lanka, where they converted the king, the queen and their people to Buddhism.

A Chunar sandstone pillar fragment, lies near Stupa 1 and carries the famous edict of Ashoka warning against schism in the Buddhist community. Stupa 1 was found empty, while relics of the two disciples of Buddha enshrined in the adjacent Stupa 3 were carried away to England. The nearby modern temple has a reliquary containing the remains of a Buddhist teacher from another stupa outside Sanchi.

The Sanchi hill goes up in shelves with Stupa 2 situated on a lower shelf, while Stupa 1, Stupa 3, the 5th century Gupta temple No. 17 and the 7th century temple No. 18 are on the intermediate shelf while a later monastery is on the crowning shelf. The balustrade surrounding Stupa 2, carved with aniconic representations of the Buddha, was added in the late 2nd century BC under the Shungas, while the four gateways of Stupa 1 were built in the 1st century BC under the Satavahanas.

Carved with stories of the Buddha's past and present lives and with incidents from the subsequent history of Buddhism, the gateways are the finest specimens of early classical art, which formed the seedbed for the entire vocabulary of later Indian art.

Two of the moving stories told on these portals are those of Prince Vessantara, who gave away his wealth, his wife and children out of charity and compassion, and of Buddha who, as the monkey king, sacrificed his life to save his companions.



The inscriptions on the gateways mention donors from all over northern India and special mention is made of ivory workers of Vidisha who sculpted the stone with the precision of jewellers.

The adjacent Gupta temple No. 17 was hailed by Sir John Marshall as one of the most rationally organised structures in Indian architecture. Though small, it was a herald of all the principles which went into the engineering of an Indian temple in the early medieval period. The Buddhas in the perambulatory surrounding Stupa 1 are not contemporary with the Stupa but belong to the Gupta period in the mid-5th century A.D. The monastery and the temple with the tall pillars adjacent to Stupa 1 and the temple near the monastery on the crowning shelf illustrate the evolution of the architectural form after the 5th century Gupta temple.

Below the hill, the Archaeological Survey of India Museum houses some of the earliest known stone sculptures in Indian art from the 3rd to the 1st century BC while the adjacent town of Vidisha has a State Museum with medieval sculptures. The nearby monuments, like the 2nd century B.C. Heliodoros Pillar, the 5th century A.D. Udayagiri Caves and the Lohangi Hill monuments in Vidisha are situated within a radius of 10 km from Sanchi, and are well worth a visit.

What to See

Great Stupa No. 1 : The oldest stone structure in India, 36.5 m in diameter and 16.4 m high, and with a massive hemispherical dome, the stupa stands in eternal majesty, the paved procession path around it worn smooth by centuries of pilgrims.

The Four Gateways : Early Buddhist art has no finer expression than these toranas that surround the Great Stupa.

The Buddha, according to the tenets of early Buddhist art, is portrayed in symbols: the lotus representing his birth, the tree his enlightenment, the wheel, derived from the title of his first sermon, the footprints and throne symbolising his presence.



Buddhist monk meditating near Great Stupa No. 1



Stupa No. 2

These have been carved with such inspired intensity and imagery that, taken together with the surrounding figures, they are considered the finest of all Buddhist toranas, and counter-balance the massive solidity of the stupa they encircle.

Eastern Gateway : Depicts the young prince, Gautama, leaving his father's palace on his journey towards enlightenment and the dream his mother had before his birth.

The Western Gateway : Depicts the seven incarnations of the Buddha.

The Northern Gateway : Crowned by a wheel of law, this depicts the miracles associated with the Buddha as told in the Jatakas.

The Southern Gateway : The birth of Gautama is revealed in a series of dramatically rich carvings.

Stupa No. 2: This Stupa stands at the very edge of the hill and its most striking feature is the stone balustrade that rings it.

Stupa No.3 : Situated close to the Great Stupa. The hemispherical dome is crowned, as a mark of its special religious significance, with an umbrella of polished stone. The relics of Sariputra and Mandgalyayana, two of the Buddha's earliest disciples, were found in its innermost chamber.

The Ashoka Pillar : Lies close to the southern gateway of the Great Stupa, and is one of the finest examples of the Ashoka pillars, known for its aesthetic proportions and exquisite structural balance.

The Buddhist Vihara : The sacred relics of the Satdhara Stupa, a few km away from Sanchi, have been enshrined in a glass casket on a platform in the inner sanctum of this modern monastery.

The Great Bowl : Carved out of a single block of stone, this mammoth bowl contained the food that was distributed among the monks of Sanchi.

The Gupta Temple : This 5th century AD temple is one of the earliest known examples of temple architecture in India.



Jatak tales on Sanchi gateway